

The Theatre That Was Rome, April 9, 2004-July 11, 2004

The material on view is drawn primarily from the exceptional private collection of Vincent J. Buonanno (Brown University, BA 1966), supplemented with drawings and prints from The RISD Museum's collection. This exhibition shows how artists and publishers capitalized on the theatrical nature of Rome's architectural and engineering feats, religious processions and ceremonies, and the disposition of its famous antiquities. From early printed guidebooks of the mid 15th-century to late 18th-century works by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, maps and views were marketable commodities. As Rome became the focus of tourists - among them many antiquarians, pilgrims, artists, and architects - printed books, maps, and single-sheet views fixed images of the city in the minds of those who had not yet visited it, as well as those who re-experienced their journeys by poring over these increasingly grand albums.

Textual guidebooks to the locations of Rome's most important churches were first published in pocket size for pilgrims during the mid-15th century. By the 16th century, these small volumes had been updated with the addition of printed illustrations. Ancient monuments were increasingly added to the lists of religious sites until they eventually became of equal importance in the illustrated books. By the mid-16th century, tourists could easily buy engravings of the city's major marvels to take home with them. By the 17th century, lavishly illustrated books of Rome's wonders - ancient and contemporary sites, festivals, gardens, fountains, and overall plans of the city itself - issued from the presses in many editions.

If early modern Rome was a theater, then the guides and picture books displayed here were the playbills and libretti that interpreted the city for the spectator. The works in the Museum's exhibition are grouped into themes that demonstrate how Rome was staged for its various audiences. The exhibition continues at the John Hay Library, Brown University, with a focus on festival images. The John Hay Library (open weekdays, 9 am - 5 pm) is located at 20 Prospect Street, between Waterman and College Streets, an easy walk from the Museum.

This project would not have been possible without the extraordinary generosity of Vincent J. Buonanno. The exhibition has been organized by Professor Evelyn Lincoln and the students of her Brown University graduate practicum in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, working closely with staff at The RISD Museum. | sub wall label: The displays of objects in this gallery have been assigned letters from A to N to suggest a sequence for viewing the exhibition. The "Nolli map numbers" appearing in brackets at the end of label texts (and occasionally within the label text, where applicable) allow you to locate buildings and monuments on the very large map at the far end of the room [I: wall]. The New Map of Rome by Giovanni Battista Nolli was published in 1748 and provides a larger context for the subjects of the prints on view.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Italian, 1720-1778

Avanzi degl' Aquedotti Neroniani chi si velevano distruggere... piedi
(*Remains of the Aqueduct of Nero*), from *Vedute di Roma (Views of Rome)*, 1775

Etching on paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 45.181



Hubert Robert, French, 1733-1808

Landscape, 1760s

Crayon on paper

Museum Appropriation Fund 38.150

Hubert Robert, French, 1733-1808

The Gallery of the Palazzo Dei Conservatori in Rome, 1762

Crayon on laid paper

Museum Appropriation Fund 38.149



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Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Italian, 1720-1778

Veduta dell' Isola Tiberina (View of the Isle of Tiber), from *Vedute di Roma (Views of Rome)*, 1775

Etching on laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 1986.167.3

When he first came to Rome, Piranesi studied etching (1740-43) under Giuseppe Vasi. Their respective views of the Tiber River reveal the radically different manner in which teacher and student approached the subject. Vasi [E: case] depicts contemporary scenes and architecture. On the left are the houses of the Ghetto (1) into which Paul IV segregated the Jews in a papal bull of 1555. At right is one of the mills (4) that transformed the flow of the Tiber into power for grinding grain. Piranesi, however, emphasizes the island's mythological past. Through distinctive use of light and shadow and distortion of scale, Piranesi showed the island in its legendary shape as a boat, dedicated to Aesculapius, the god of healing



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Italian, 1720-1778

View of the pyramidal Tomb of Cestius (Veduta del Sepolcro di Cajo Cestio), from *Vedute di Roma (Views of Rome)*, 1755

Etching on paper

Gift of Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf 16.593

Piranesi made four etchings of this very popular monument of Roman antiquity, the pyramidal tomb of Caius Cestius, an official during the reign of emperor Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE). Built before the year 12 BCE, the tomb became incorporated into the ancient Aurelian Wall surrounding the city, and it was restored in 1663. Piranesi shows the perfect geometry of the pyramid while using the texture of the stonework on the sides to present the tomb as a magnificent but weather-beaten survivor of the ages, emphasizing his concern for the care of the city's antiquities.



Hubert Robert, French, 1733-1808

Antique Ruins with Figures, ca. 1765-1778

Pen and ink, brush and wash, watercolor, and white heightening over black chalk on paper

Museum Appropriation Fund 38.152

Hubert Robert was a resident of the French Academy in Rome from 1754 to 1765. Young French artists who were awarded the prestigious Prix de Rome would study and live in the Academy's



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building at the expense of the French government. Plaster copies of ancient statues, not only from Rome, but from all of Italy, were available on the premises as a convenient means for students to train in drawing. Robert's fantasy of an enormous pyramid surrounded by Greek and Roman ruins was likely inspired by Piranesi's imaginative architectural etchings with their dramatic scale and tonal effects.

Jacob van der Ulft, Dutch, 1627-1689
The Pyramid of Caius Cestius, mid 1600s - late 1600s
Brush and wash over black chalk on paper
Anonymous gift 60.055



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Italian, 1720-1778
Part of the ancient Appian Way three miles outside Porta San Sebastiano, Antichità Romane de' Tempi della Repubblica e de' Primi Imperator..., 1748
Etching
Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 47.720.29



Giuseppe Vasi, Italian, 1710-1782
Tiber Island toward the West I. Jewish Ghetto (Isola Tiberina Verso Occidente I. Ghetto degli Ebrei), from the series *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna*, 1747-1761
Etching on paper
Gift of Professor and Mrs. David Kossoff 80.220.13



The *Acqua Giulia* belongs to the group of archaeological publications that Piranesi produced during the 1750s as an extension of *Le Antichità Romane*. The treatise explains the manner in which the ancient Romans distributed water for the use of the city. Piranesi's enduring fascination with the urban aqueduct system reflects his early training under his uncle, an hydraulics engineer. The illustration here shows the building that houses the display of water at the end of the aqueduct. The image combines architectural diagrams with a fantastic view of the ruins, presenting a stage for Piranesi's multiple personas: antiquarian, engineer, architect, etcher, and romantic.

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Charles Michel-Ange Challe, French, 1718-1778

Ruined Roman Arches, mid 1700s

Black and white chalks on blue paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 59.084

Trained as an architect but later to become a painter, Challe attended the French Academy in Rome from 1742 to 1749, an unusually long period of time. His drawings reflect his study of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's bold style and dramatic compositional effects. Challe is often credited with bringing the Italian master's approach to France. The study on view may depict the Flavian Amphitheater (the Colosseum). It evokes a romantic vision of the ancient Roman ruin that inspired artists, collectors, and travelers taking the Grand Tour of Europe's cultural monuments.

